

Georgia Department of Human Resources

GEORGIA FATHERHOOD PROGRAM

Georgia is helping more low-income fathers than any other state in the country. Since 1997, the Georgia Fatherhood Program has helped over 13,000 non-custodial parents find jobs that enable them to pay their child support. An additional 3,000 non-custodial parents are currently in job training classes, studying for their GED or receiving help to overcome other barriers to stable employment. The Georgia Fatherhood Program is sponsored by the Georgia Department of Human Resources and is recognized nationally as the most comprehensive program in the country for helping low-income fathers.

Welfare reform and the time limits on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits have raised awareness that receiving a child support check each month can make the difference in whether or not a family needs public assistance. In 2004, TANF cases represented 17 percent of all child support cases in Georgia. However, only 11 percent of all TANF cases received a child support check during the year. Georgia recognized early on that many non-custodial parents wanted to pay their court ordered child support, but lacked the economic capacity to do so. The Department of Human Resources' Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) has partnered with other government and community agencies to develop a comprehensive network of services for this group.

The Fatherhood Program:

- Generally takes three to six months to complete.
- Participants are required to work at least 20 hours per week while enrolled in the program.
- Participants are required to pay child support during this time.
- Upon completion of the program, participants receive assistance in obtaining full-time employment, earning a wage that they can live on and pay their child support.

The Georgia Fatherhood Program is implemented by the Fatherhood Services Network, sponsored by the Department of Human Resources' Office of Child Support Enforcement. The Network includes:

- Georgia Department of Human Resources
- Child Access and Visitation Program
- Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgement Program
- Georgia Family Connections Partnership
- OCSE, which contracts with:
 - Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education
 - Georgia Department of Labor
 - DeKalb County Fatherhood Initiative Network

Taxpayer Savings:

- Decreased Medicaid cost. Non-custodial parents are required to obtain medical insurance through their employer if available at a reasonable cost.
- Decreased enforcement costs. Employer withholding of support payments eliminates the need for enforcement action.
- Decreased incarceration costs. Because judges now have a new sentencing alternative to jail, taxpayers save the estimated \$50 per day cost of housing an inmate.
- Decreased need for custodial parents to depend on TANF and other government services.

Employer and Community Benefits:

- Increased employment benefits the local economy.
- Reduction in the rate of repeat pregnancies by young participants.
- Local employers are finding new sources of skilled labor, which is often in short supply

Judicial Support:

- Judges now have a new alternative to jail for parents who are unable to pay their child support.

Barriers facing many participants include:

- Lack of a high school diploma (42%)
- Criminal record (56%)
- No transportation (43%)
- No driver's license (32%)
- Alcohol and substance abuse problems
- Mental health issues

Looking to the future and overcoming the barriers:

OCSE realizes that addressing these barriers is critical to expanding the success of the program to more low-income fathers. The office is working to establish new partnerships with Public Health, Mental Health, Family Connections and community-based groups to address the many barriers facing fathers and families. Communities across the state already have services in place that can help fathers and families right where they live. Many people believe that the family is the strength of the community, and the community of Georgia deserves strong fathers to continue to establish Georgia as a leader and role model for the nation.

For information about the Georgia Fatherhood Services Network, contact your local Child Support Enforcement office.